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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the use and distribution patterns of the Discourse Marker (DM) "You Know" in interviews with members of a Hispanic folklore dance troupe. The study attempts to demonstrate how the use of this DM expresses identity among Hispanic females and if its use is affected by the ethnic labels each speaker uses. By assessing data from interviews conducted with 11 speakers and categorizing the DM "You Know" into four functions of meanings, results suggest that a self-identifying ethnic label, age, and personal background are determinants in the usage of the DM. (Contains 13 references and 3 tables.) (KFT)

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"...IN MEXICO I'M CALLED A *'GAVACHA'* YOU KNOW?...IN THE US I'M CALLED A *'SPICK'* YOU KNOW?...I'M STILL LOOKED DOWN UPON..."

MARKING SHARED CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH 'YOU KNOW' USAGE AMONG HISPANIC FEMALES

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"...In Mexico I'm Called a *'Gavacha'* You Know?...In the US I'm Called a *'Spick'* You Know?...I'm Still Looked Down Upon..."

Marking Shared Cultural Knowledge Through 'You Know' Usage among Hispanic Females

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the following study was to analyze the use and distribution patterns of the Discourse Marker (DM) 'You Know' in interviews with members of a Hispanic folkloric dance troupe. The study attempts to demonstrate if the use of the DM 'You Know' expresses identity among Hispanic females and if the use of 'You Know' is affected by the ethnic labels each speaker uses. By assessing the data from interviews conducted with the 11 speakers and categorizing the DM 'You Know' into four functions of meanings, results suggest that a self-identifying ethnic label, age and personal background are determinants in the usage of the DM 'You Know.'

INTRODUCTION

In the past thirty years, language as a symbol of shared ethnicity has been of great interest. It has become clear that the cultural vitality of an ethnic group is often embedded in their distinctive language or ethnic speech style (Giles, 1979: 17). Language and ethnicity are linked from a perspective of individual self-identification. People grow up with a sense of their gender

roles, social standing and an idea of who they are as members of a particular group of people in contrast to members of other groups (p. 157).

Understanding and recognizing the role of language within a particular ethnic group is important in order to understand the cultural norms of a group and their constructed identity. An increased amount of language research focuses on the level of discourse between individuals, including the role of Discourse Markers (DMs) in extended conversation (Schourup, 1999: 228).

This study will focus on the Discourse Marker (DM) 'You Know' and the role it plays in expressing identity among Hispanic[1] females and whether this role varies depending on specific ethnic identity one adheres to, namely *Chicana, Mexican-American* or *Hispanic.*

DMs, including the lexical *well, I mean, like, so* and *then* were once defined as "...random hesitation phenomenon having little to do with people's inherent knowledge about their language..." (Ostman, 1981:15). Additional views tended to stigmatize DMs as 'verbal crutches' used by those deficient in

[1] Throughout the course of this paper, the single term Hispanic will be used to describe all participants until we move to a discussion of the various ethnic self-identity labels each participant uses.

speaking ability (Goldberg, 1980 as read in Schourup, 1983). The following is a general statement made by a speaker for this study. Her example demonstrates the recurring use of DMs in oral language.

Example:

Speaker: ***I'm like*** she came up and pushed me ***you know*** and ***I like*** walked off and ***so then like*** she came up to me again and she ***was like***, 'Aren't you gonna fight me?' Just because I had an opinion. ***So I mean*** she laid off.

Other disconcerting notions about the uses of DMs were that the appearance of DMs was limited to verbal communication. Research studies on DMs over the last twenty years have defined DMs as words or phrases that function as facilitators in the process of interpreting ideas in conversation that are tied by the speaker in a coherent manner (Risselada & Spooren, 1998: 132).

Of the different forms and functions of DMs, one particular DM that has had substantial research is the DM 'You Know' (YK). Its interesting role in discourse is that it occurs so frequently in conversation. It can appear so often that its use by some speakers is apt to be stigmatized, even by the speakers themselves, as a

dysfluency. Others use 'YK' sparingly, but those who do not use it at all are uncommon (Schourup, 1983: 68).

Schiffrin (1987) states that the 'YK' literal meanings directly influence its use in discourse to mark transitions relevant for listener participation (p.267). Categories of 'YK' functions to be considered here are: 1) Marking a Shared Cultural Knowledge, 2) Marking a General Knowledge of what is known or not known, 3) Narrative forms and 4) Interactional relevance between interlocutors. Let us now describe the different categories of functions.

1) In Marking a Shared Cultural Knowledge, the speaker of a particular ethnic group is engaging in conversation that includes ethnic references of information that tend to be wholly understood by the listener. The listener is also a member of the same ethnic group or is assumed a member by the speaker.

Example 1:

Interviewer: Who has been an important figure in your life?

Speaker: Guelitas[2] ***you know***, they don't want you to wear short skirts but mine always did and she came from

[2] Spanish diminutive of 'Grandmother.'

Mexico so ***you know*** she was born ahead of her time.

2) Marking General Knowledge of what is known and not known, 'YK' functions to connect the listener's understanding to the speaker and as a result share a common knowledge of society's culture and what the listener knows or does not know about the speaker. There is no particular need for the listener to be a part of the same ethnic group when marking a general knowledge function of 'YK'.

Example 2a:

Interviewer: Why are people part of certain groups in school?

Speaker: Well most of the 'jocks' ***you know***, they play sports and the 'preps' ***you know*** they dress in style and ***you know*** the 'nerds' don't dress in style and they're not popular.

Example 2b:

Interviewer: What is your schedule at work like?

Speaker: Sometimes I make home visits [social worker] in the morning and sometime because parents work, ***you know*** I try to be as flexible as possible in setting up appointments so sometimes I'll have appointments at six o'clock ***you know*** and that can last for thirty minutes.

3) In Narratives, 'YK' is used when a hearer is invited to share in the discourse being accomplished through a particular kind of storytelling. The hearer becomes the information recipient and also an audience member to a past history of the speaker.

Example 3:

Interviewer: What brought you to this dance company?

Speaker: I was with a city-funded program and I had gotten to the highest level ***you know*** so I had been in that group when other dance companies or parents interfered and ***you know*** they would corrupt the instructors.

4) Interactional 'YK' marks two forms of knowledge; either the listener producing talk (e.g., *mmhm, uhhuh*) to acknowledge understanding of the speaker's discourse or the speaker's attempt to use an argumentative topic with 'YK' to convert the listener's own opinion on a subject (e.g., God). Often found at the end of an utterance, this 'YK' functions as a question to which some expected response of affirmation is expected from the listener .

Example 4a:

Speaker: I can do a group project or something like that. I could get along with anybody ***you know***?

Interviewer: Mmhm, yeah.

Example 4b:

Speaker: Is that your job as a Christian to get people to go to your church?

Interviewer: In a way ***you know*** because people will get left behind when tribulation comes if they're not a Christian. I mean ***you know*** no one knows the day or the hour when God is coming.

As *Fillers*, 'YK' functions as fillers of pauses with no direct or indirect meaning within the utterance that is relevant to the four focused functions of this study. *Fillers* presented themselves within a small majority of the speakers throughout the interviews. Although this function was calculated along with the results of the four 'YK' functions, *Fillers* did not become part of the final data analysis.

Example:

Interviewer: As Hispanics, what do we call ourselves?

Speaker: Chicanos, Latinas, Hispanics, Mexican-American, and of course you know Puerto Ricans call themselves Boriquas and ***you know*** um yeah but I think that's pretty much it.

One use of 'YK' can fill multiple functions. Through the study of 'YK,' we can determine what speakers can reasonably expect particular listeners to know, what they expect to share and what information can be acquired (Schiffrin, 1987). However, DM research, including 'YK,' has been mostly on adult speech, young children or comparative gender analysis among Anglo-American groups (Risselada, 1998). Less is known about the role of DMs in Hispanic discourse.

Thus, the following analysis looks at the functions of the DM 'YK' in interviews with female members of a Hispanic folkloric dance troupe. The findings will demonstrate if types of shared cultural knowledge exist among Hispanic females and whether their own ethnic-label affects the types of 'YK' use in oral language.

METHODS

Setting

Part of a larger study that explored language and social identity among Mexican-American youth in South Texas, life history interviews were conducted with eleven participants enrolled at the Lourdes Maria Dance Company (LMDC) in San

Bernardo, Texas. Interviews were analyzed for 'YK' function use of the speakers.

The LMDC is part of the larger non-profit Lourdes Maria Cultural Arts Center (LMCAC), dating its beginning back more than thirty years and situated in the predominantly Hispanic westside of San Bernardo, Texas. According to population reports, approximately 60% of the city's population is of Hispanic origin. The westside area houses low to moderately low-income families.

The LMCAC offers to the public a variety of year-round disciplines in the arts at low costs for the promotion of cultural awareness and pride within the Hispanic community. At the time of the study, the speakers were between the ages of 13 and 28 and permanently residing in various areas of San Bernardo although not on the westside. The period of time the subjects took part as folkloric dancers at the LMDC ranged from four months to four years. The speakers in this research study are all members of the LMDC. Over the course of three months each speaker was interviewed separately with each interview lasting from 45 minutes to 2 hours.

The interview sessions covered a range of general questions pertaining to the speakers' personal and family history, educational

background (academic and dance), impressions about ethnicity, Spanish language use and personal identity as well as their involvement in dance.

Speakers:

All of the speakers are natives of San Bernardo with the exception of Susan who came from the Texas-Mexico border town of Del Valle one year before to attend community college in San Bernardo. Speakers also differ in socio-economic backgrounds. Although the majority of the speakers reside in the same general area of San Bernardo, there was no prior relationship with each other prior to membership in the LMDC. During the interviews, it was discovered that subjects often shared similarities that were not overtly visible as that of gender and ethnicity.

Table 1 lists information compiled from the speakers during their interviews that will further supplement the results and analysis of the study on 'YK' usage. Ethnic-labels (ETHLA), age, educational backgrounds (EDU), the Spanish language (SPN), parent professions (PRNPRO) and the San Bernardo neighborhood of residence (NEIGH) were used for more insight into the speakers' personal background.

TABLE 1: Speaker Background Information

Name	ETHLA	Age	EDU	SPN	PRNPR	NEIGH
Jasmine	Mex-Amer	23	II Year/Community College	Some	Air Force/Homemaker	78226
Susan	Mex-Amer	22	II Year/Community College	Bilingual	Manager/Administrator	78209
Julie	Mex-Amer	15	I Year/High School	Bilingual	Psychologist/Graphic Designer	78212
Chris	Mex-Amer	13	II Year/Middle School	Some	Engineer/Accountant	78212
Rebecca	Hispanic	26	MA Recipient	Some	Truck Driver/Insurance Broker	78212
Claudia	Hispanic	15	Home School	None	Computer Scientist/Homemaker	78240
Galilea	Chicana	19	I Year/Community College	Bilingual	Construction/Homemaker	78229
Victoria	Chicana	19	I Year/UTSB	Some	Architect/Artist	78229
Evette	Hispanic-Italian	15	I Year/High School	None	City Planner/Teacher	78250
Angela	Mex-Costa Rican	14	III Year/Middle School	Some	Artists/Entrepreneur	78212
Lourdes	Cuban	14	III Year/Middle School	Bilingual	Roofer/Homemaker	78228

Speakers disclosed city code of neighborhood to determine where each participant resided in San Bernardo. With the exception of Jasmine, Galilea, Victoria, Evette and Claudia, all of the participants live in areas of San Bernardo with a majority of the Hispanic origin population (Jones, 1994). This information will be relevant when looking at the different types of existing cultural or ethnic influences that may affect 'YK' usage to mark a shared cultural identity or a shared knowledge among the speakers.

According to the information, the speakers' socio-economic backgrounds vary from moderate to high-middle-class. Education was an important part of the subjects' life. Over half of the speakers have completed or are completing some form of higher education as the interviews indicated. All of the younger speakers also plan to continue their education (either in dance or elsewhere) after high school graduation.

Although the claimed level of Spanish language ability was different for all of the speakers, each felt Spanish to be important for two particular reasons: to communicate with non-English speaking residents and tourists in San Bernardo and to enhance their Hispanic heritage.

Ethnic labels yielded responses based on the speaker's personal experiences, cultural beliefs and a general definition of 'labels.' The term *'Hispanic'* was used among several speakers who felt more a part of mainstream American society rather than Mexican society. The '*Mexican-Americans*' saw themselves as not only 'American' but also coming from a Mexican family or cultural background. '*Chicana*,' although mentioned less often among the speakers, was used as a way to not homogenize the Mexican heritage with other Hispanic heritage groups. Therefore, rejecting generalized terms such as *Hispanic*. *Chicanas* in the study felt a need to embrace the label's political message of maintaining cultural autonomy and pride in the speakers' ethnic background. Other labels chosen by the speakers (Hispanic-Italian, Mexican-Costa Rican, Cuban) stem from the speakers' specific parent ethnic backgrounds not all of Mexican heritage and not due to a particular ethnic belief system.

Data Analysis

Upon completion, the taped interviews were transcribed using the CHILDES format program for coding oral language (MacWhinney, 1995). All uses of 'YK' were coded and given a

total use percentage (%) and an additional % of 'YK' use according to *function*. To examine the role of 'YK' in marking shared identity, the background information taken from each speaker was incorporated into the analysis once the results were calculated.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

The total use of 'YK' by all of the speakers was 1850 with a range between 2 and 440. Once all of the 'YK' functions were coded into 5 categories (including initial *Fillers*), the speakers were identified by ethnic label. The question at hand was then addressed, namely what are the uses of 'YK' for this particular group of speakers and what specific types of information are marked with 'YK' as information that is part of shared cultural knowledge.

Table 2 below demonstrates the overall use of 'YK' per interview. Preliminary results show the total number of 'YK' usage, the total number of utterances and the percentage of the 'YK' usage from the total number of utterances for each speaker. Since the interviews varied in time, a % of 'YK' by utterance was

calculated for an even distribution of 'YK' use among the speakers regardless of length of time for each interview.

Table 2: Ratio of 'YK' Usage and Total Utterances Among Speakers

Name	# of Total 'Y-K'	# of Total Utterances	% of 'YK' Usage
Claudia	365	507	71%
Rebecca	359	582	61%
Jasmine	192	430	44%
Susan	421	1095	38%
Chris	83	286	29%
Victoria	117	560	20%
Galilea	156	762	20%
Angela	82	683	12%
Evette	69	623	11%
Julie	30	395	7.5%
Lourdes	2	358	1%

As a rough first look at the percentage (%) of utterances that contain a general use of 'YK,' there is a clustering of speakers by ethnic identity, age and those having an identity most closely aligned with Anglo-American culture resulting in a higher % of 'YK' use in discourse. The majority of the 'YK' users including (Rebecca, Claudia, Susan, Jasmine and Chris) may have all had a higher percentage of general use of 'YK' than others because they shared similar or same ethnic labels of either *Hispanic* or *Mexican-*

American. The exception was Julie who, although *Mexican-American,* may have used less 'YK' because of her age.

Therefore, age of the speakers may have also affected the use of 'YK' since the majority of the younger speakers in this study were found to use the least amount of 'YK.' A level of formality may have been taken by the younger speakers with their older, unknown interviewer during the taped session to cause a decrease in the use of 'YK' which is a DM often used in casual conversation.

The exceptions for these assumptions about these first preliminary sets of results are Claudia (71%) and Chris (29%). For Claudia, her results may have been affected by both the use of her Interactional 'YK' where the DM is seen as an element for argumentative discourse and her topics of interest. She talked about God and religion and how both pertained to her world and should pertain to others. This tended to affect her interview by not talking as much about issues of herself and her ethnic label. She has also been home schooled all of her life and thus perhaps has not had much exposure to teenage peers in an environment where patterns of language use and attitudes may often develop.

Although inconsistent with the age analysis in Table 2, *Chicanas,* Victoria and Galilea had more specific examples of discrimination and conflicting issues of identity than the other speakers during the interviews including reasons for labeling themselves *'Chicanas'* which placed them in a higher % usage for 'YK' to mark shared cultural knowledge in Table 3.

Table 3 shows a breakdown of 'YK' use according to function, excluding *Fillers*, to indicate each category use with particular focus placed on the 'YK' usage for shared culture and general knowledge.

Table 3 'YK' Functions and Ratios for Subjects and Interview

	Cultural %	General %	Narrative %	Interactional %
HISPANIC				
REBECCA	8%	39%	8%	0%
CLAUDIA	2%	33%	5%	19%
MEXICAN-AMERICAN				
SUSAN	8%	21%	6%	1%
JASMINE	5%	31%	7%	0%
CHRIS	1%	21%	5%	0%
JULIE	1%	5%	0%	0%
CHICANA				
VICTORIA	6%	11%	1%	0%
GALILEA	7%	6%	1%	4%
MEXICAN-COSTA RICAN				
ANGELA	0%	8%	1%	11%
HISPANIC-ITALIAN				
EVETTE	0%	9%	0%	1%
CUBAN				
LOURDES	0%	0%	0%	0%

According to Table 3 the distribution % of 'YK' for shared culture and shared knowledge in both categories indicates a higher usage of 'YK' among speaker that are older and have a close affinity to their ethnic identity of either *Mexican-American* or *Chicana* namely Susan, Victoria, Galilea and Jasmine with the exception of these ethnic labels for Rebecca. As a *Hispanic*, Rebecca had the highest % of 'YK' use to mark shared cultural knowledge.

Although Hispanics often see *Hispanic* as a depolitizing term imposed by the US government (Mora, 1993), Rebecca, also the oldest of the speakers, feels in-tune with her ethnic label as being *from* the US and *not* Mexico therefore she calls herself *Hispanic.* Rebecca's family roots go back generations to the same small Texas town outside of San Bernardo. *Mexican-Americans,* according to Rebecca, are people that have parents *from* Mexico or who are recent immigrants.

Age also was an apparent factor in 'YK' use to mark shared culture and its use may have been affected by the fact that the speakers were older or younger. This may have led to less formal settings for the sessions with the approximately same-aged interviewer. This may not have been the case for the younger speakers however. In addition, the older speakers may have been more exposed to situations dealing with ethnicity and/or discrimination than the younger speakers who may not have had the same experiences. Galilea, for example, spoke openly about her bouts with an elementary school teacher accusing ethnic minorities of never finishing high school. Victoria felt as a pre-med student that not much attention is given to increasing the number of Hispanic professionals in the medical field. These topics may have

caused a higher use of 'YK' to mark a shared cultural knowledge among *Chicanas* for this study.

Younger speakers such as Angela, Evette and Lourdes, although recognize their Hispanic heritage in one form or another, never thought about ethnicity, spent most of their time with or in an Anglo-American environment or related to a Hispanic culture like *Cuban*, which is different from San Bernardo's majority Hispanic community. These factors may have affected their use of 'YK' to mark a shared cultural knowledge. Unlike their young dance partners, Chris enjoyed being a 'traditional' girl and planned on taking part in Mexican events such as the 'Quincenera' which celebrates the coming of age of young girls in Mexico. Julie also related to her ethnic heritage by insisting on the importance of speaking Spanish formally as opposed to slang. They had the highest percentages in 'YK' use to mark a shared cultural knowledge including Claudia who mentioned phenotype as a characteristic that society often uses to stereotypically label a person Hispanic.

Other preliminary results in relation to a shared cultural knowledge without calculating the use of 'YK' in the discourse, dealt with the speakers having the same affinity to the Spanish

language as mentioned before, and an appreciation of their Hispanic culture through their affiliation with dance. Since the speakers were Hispanic, all dancers for an average of 10 years, members of the LMDC and the LMCAC, worked and studied among other Hispanics and live close to the Texas-Mexico border influence, these facts coupled together may have affected the number of instances of 'YK' to mark shared cultural knowledge among the speakers that may not have occurred otherwise.

The results for 'YK' usage to mark a shared general knowledge also indicate that ethnic label was a contributing factor in sharing this general knowledge of society. Age was not a factor in distribution since there exists a disparity in results for Victoria and Galilea's usage of 'YK' for this particular function. All of the speakers that had a higher % of usage may have assumptions that the interviewer, a Hispanic female, had a clear general knowledge of society. Those speakers labeled *Hispanic* and *Mexican-American* with the exception of Julie, may be more accepting of the status of Hispanics in the US than the *Chicanas* and therefore used a higher % of 'YK' to mark a shared general knowledge.

IMPLICATIONS

These preliminary results indicate that a shared ethnic identity, age of the speaker, affiliation (or non-affiliation) with the Anglo-American society, personal experiences and the geographical location of speakers within San Bernardo may affect the general use of 'YK' that also marks a shared cultural knowledge among Hispanic females. This may suggest that language use and 'YK' use, represent something about a person's ethnic identity, their age and their relationship with the listener including ethnic similarities and their role or feelings towards the dominant Anglo-American society.

Hispanics may also use DMs, according to these preliminary results, to reaffirm their ethnic identity through a shared cultural knowledge as this study with the older speakers indicate. By looking at the general role that 'YK' plays in discourse, its breakdown of functions may help to ask further questions about ethnic minority groups attempting to separate themselves from the dominant culture using a particular dominant culture feature in oral language such as the DM 'YK.'.

This study of patterns for DMs can further help to understand language styles among the diverse groups within the

Hispanic community that is based on ethnic labeling. As the US Hispanic population continues to expand among an already diverse population, with over 60% of those Hispanics being of Mexican descent, a varied range of language use and forms may help to further understand their particular integration into American society (Locke, 1992) while still trying to maintain a separate ethnic identity through marking shared cultural knowledge.

Society, in general, would benefit more if an understanding of Hispanic ties to ethnicity and language would be further studied. Prospective gains from studies such as this represents a component of a larger knowledge of understanding of Hispanics that includes a diverse group of individuals. This information about language patterns, 'YK' usage and affecting ethnic labels attempts to gain a redefinition and clarity of Hispanics, their identity and how their use of language includes DMs in oral conversation to mark patterns of identity.

FUTURE RESEARCH & LIMITATIONS

This study contained only a small sample and preliminary results that were qualitative which therefore cannot have any conclusive generalizations of 'YK' usage marking shared cultural

knowledge among groups of Hispanics at this time. As with any broad variety of individuals, it is difficult to locate a common representative of any group, especially in a community as large and diverse as that of Hispanics (Galindo, L., & Gonzalez, M.D., 1999).

These results represent one particular set of individuals and may not account for other Hispanic females in a group that may or may not use the same ethnic labels or how they perceive relationships with other Hispanic women in terms of sharing a cultural knowledge.

The study's focus on 'YK' did not deviate into the specific uses of other DMs that may have also been used throughout the interview sessions by the speakers. Other DMs that contain similar functions as 'YK' and it's sharing of knowledge such as: *You Know What I Mean?* or *You See?* were used in several instances, however, the number of occurrences were not enough to compile a substantial database from all of the participants using these types of DMs. Because no other data on other forms of DMs, were collected, there is no certainty that the number of 'YK' uses and functions were directly affected by the speakers use of other DMs in the taped conversations.

Furthermore, a Hispanic female interviewer based the research on a one-time session with the speakers. No prior study on DM 'YK' usage among either Hispanic females or Hispanic males and females combined to mark a shared cultural knowledge have been conducted. There is limited research to assert or disclaim what this study has found from the preliminary results. Finally, future longitudinal research among Hispanics and other members of ethnic minority groups needs to be continued to determine whether the results in this study on shared cultural knowledge and the use of DMs such as 'YK' is able to help close the gap in the field of language use and ethnic patterns.

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